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Edmund Kujawa remembered leaving the United States to fight in Europe.

The Wilmette resident said, "I sailed from Boston Harbor, and when I saw the skyline disappear, I thought to myself, 'God I hope I come back and see this.'"

Kujawa not only came back, but was honored at Friday's Veterans Day celebration in Buffalo Grove for his service in both the Invasion of Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge.

On Friday, Kujawa, who served as an Army Private First Class, received his Purple Heart from U.S. Rep Mark Kirk, a Highland Park Republican. Kujawa recently contacted Kirk's office, thinking he had some medals due him. It turned out he did, including the Purple Heart.

While serving in Europe, he was hit in the chest by shrapnel but returned to fight only 12 days later.

"I'd like to thank God for being here safely and amongst all you fine, excellent, top notch Americans. I take my hat off to all you veterans. You guys are real heroes. But the real heroes were left behind," Kujawa told the crowd.

Asked whether the war was often in his thoughts in later years, he said, "For years I never thought about anything. Since the outbreak of the Iraq war, I've been thinking a lot about it. I feel sorry for our troops that have to go and serve in the desert sand. I never experienced the sand and the grit and the heat. But I did experience the cold and I feel sorry for those boys. I wish we would clean 'em up and get it resolved and come home."

The ceremony, sponsored by the Buffalo Grove Park District, was held in the Buffalo Grove

High School auditorium and attracted a number of veterans.

Among them was Buffalo Grove resident Art Fain, who served in the Army Air Corps in England during World War II.

"Every once in a while, I think of the buddies I've lost," Fain said. "You see them one day, and the next day they're gone.

"I remember talking to one, and I said, 'Do you think you're going to make it through this war?' He said, 'I really do.' The next day, he bailed out of the plane. His parachute was on fire."

The audience at the ceremony was also treated to a presentation by Karl Abt, a Rolling Meadows author of the recently published book, "A Few Who Made a Difference." Abt served as a military intelligence officer in World War II, interrogating German prisoners of war. His book is about those experiences.

Abt recalled that the Battle of the Bulge came as a surprise to the Army, even though the intelligence Abt's group had gathered indicated it was in the works.

In discussing his method of interrogation, he said, no higher ranking officer was present during the interrogation.

"That would make a prisoner clam up, if he thinks he's going to say something important that a colonel or a major has to hear," Abt said.

In addition to learning the captive's name, rank and serial number, the interrogator would try to assess the strength of the captive's unit and its morale, as well as conditions in the captive's hometown during his last furlough.

"Nothing was written down. We stored it all in our minds, and as soon as he left the room we wrote it down as quickly as we could," Abt said.

When an audience member asked how Abt would determine whether a prisoner was telling the truth, Abt said, "We were taught that if we thought the captive was lying to us, our method was to get him to repeat his story. If it still didn't sound right to us, we asked him to repeat it again and again. Somewhere along the line, he is going to trip himself up, forget what he told you."

Abt said he was told by a major that, "If a guy won't talk, forget it, take the next one, because there are plenty of them who will tell you what you want to know."

Among the other speakers was Kirk, a Navy veteran, who remembered his own combat experiences.

"One of the scariest moments I had was over the skies of Bosnia. A Serbian searchlight, out of all the aircraft in the skies over Bosnia, found mine, and we were in the biggest, dumbest, slowest airplane in the sky.

"As that searchlight honed in on us, we thought about what could happen. We could even lose our lives that night. But then I thought about all the men and women that had served before me and the commitment that they had made. And I was ready, perfectly ready to lose everything that night for my country. We did well that night, and in many ways my conflict was easier than many other veterans."

Among those in attendance was World War II veteran and Buffalo Grove resident Elliott Rosenberg, who arrived with his wife Alice.

"Because you're stopping to think about things like this, it sort of refreshes your memory," said Rosenberg, who flew 35 missions over southern Europe and, his wife noted, brought his plane back every time and never lost a man.

"When I went overseas, I was 20 years old, and your thoughts are so different. First of all, you're invincible when you're 20. I never really gave it much thought. I was sent over. I had a job to do. I did the job, and I was anxious to get it over so I could go back home."

Buffalo Grove resident Lisa Durfey, whose brother, Army Lt. Col. Philip Logan, was recently wounded in Iraq, was also there to honor the troops. "It worries me that in a few years, a lot of these people that are here aren't going to be here anymore. Who is going to pick up for them? Who is going to remember what this is all about, other than a day to have off and go shopping ... a good time to go rake your leaves. That's not the point of the day, and people need to remember that."